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ABSTRACT

This book focuses on the lives and work of women teachers in two rural California counties between 1850 and 1950. It explores the social context of teaching and what teaching meant and provided to women teachers. Chapter 1 explores the shifts between 1840 and 1930 in representations of the woman teacher in the United States. Chapter 2 discusses the ways that assumptions about early 20th-century feminism, demands for rural education reform, ideas about progressive education, and the activism of key women educators in positions of power and influence shaped the rise of the bureaucratic educational state in California. Chapter 3 discusses the economic and demographic history of rural Tulare and Kings counties, California; the growth of their public school systems; racism and migrant workers; early one-room and private schools; and changes in the demographic profile of the teaching population. Chapters 4-6 draw on interviews to explore the lives of women teachers in the two counties through the interwar period. Personal life, childhood, teacher education, first job, deportment, physical risk, and material needs are examined for three categories of teachers: seekers of power, outsiders, and country schoolmarms. Community and social control, the marriage bar, shifting social expectations, racial and cultural differences, effects of the Depression, and responsibility and power are discussed as background to the interviews. Chapter 7 considers the impacts of the second World War, the consolidation of rural schools, and the sexual politics of the postwar years. The conclusion sums up major themes: the highly politicized nature of schooling, the school role in reproducing the dominant culture while ignoring subordinate groups and their struggles, the pleasures and satisfactions of teaching, the morally ambiguous position of teachers caring for children who were victims of state racist policies, and the challenge of feminism to patriarchal power and privilege. Included are notes, photographs, an index, and an extensive bibliography. (SAS)